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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS WELCOMES STUDENTS BACK TO SCHOOL  
WITH CHANCELLOR BANKS AND COMMISSIONER SEWELL**

**Chancellor David C. Banks, Department of Education:** It is the first day of school. It's a day that has historically filled with excitement, joy, anxiety, nervousness. The young people that we saw this morning, who were coming into school are filled with all the emotions that every single one of us has experienced before. And so we got a beautiful day. It is my first day of school as chancellor and I didn't get any sleep last night. So we've got almost a million children across New York City. And you can tell the difference already. If you were on the subways this morning, they were a little fuller. If you were driving, you saw a lot more traffic in the streets. But those are the signs that our school system and our city is back.

When we come off the malaise of the summer and we settle back into a great routine that can only happen when our kids are back in school. And so we are feeling really good about it. We're thrilled to be here with all of you today to kick off this wonderful new school year. You heard an announcement that I made yesterday with respect to school safety and some of the changes that we are implementing in our schools and across the system. And I'm glad that we are joined today — and I'm asking her to come now, our Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell — to share with you some of her own thoughts on the beginning of this new school year. Commissioner Sewell.

**Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell:** Good morning, everyone. As a child of the New York City public school system, I — walking through these halls and driving here, seeing the kids walk to school, I remember the sounds and smells of the city. The smell of number two pencils. It's good to be back. Thank you, Chancellor Banks, Mr. Mayor, the students and staff of P.S. 161 for hosting us this morning and everyone in this city who dedicates their time and effort to our youth.

Today is an exciting day as we welcome more than one million New York City public school children back to school. This is the nation's largest school system, and it is our job to keep every student teacher, administrator, and staff member safe. As we have seen, tragically across the country, the threats to our schools is very real. But the over 4,000 plus school safety agents, we know that we are highly trained, supremely skilled, and completely committed to our shared public safety mission. In more than 1,800 schools across the city, our teachers and DOE staff do an incredible job. But all of us and all of this wholly depends on the foundation of security that makes our education system possible.

Without that security, this system doesn't function. And we know that we have to get it right every single time. Because when millions of families send their children off to New York City schools they are placing an enormous amount of trust in all of us. They are trusting that their children will learn and they'll be prepared for life's challenges. But most of all, that they'll return home safely. They are trusting that we will do our job well again — each and every day. This is a huge responsibility, but it is an absolutely essential part of our city's future. And we are honored to bear it. And we are extremely happy as well to have students and teachers back inside school buildings, learning, and growing together. We look forward to working closely with our partners in the Department of Education, and the Crisis Management System, and all across the city community-based groups, our New York City school parents and families, and all of the people who have an investment in our city's youth. Your efforts are invaluable. And the NYPD is proud to be working alongside of all of you. Thank you, chancellor.

**Chancellor Banks:** Thank you. Thank you, commissioner. To bring us words of greetings for this opening school day from the Bronx is our own Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson. Vanessa.

(Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson and P.S. 161 Principal Brian Blough speak.)

**Chancellor Banks:** Thank you so much. One of the reasons why we chose to come to this school was really to highlight one of the major issues that we have made a focus for this administration. The mayor talked about, for many months before he became mayor, the issue of dyslexia and just how real and prevalent that is in our schools. And it manifests itself with so many young people after they leave our schools who never got the help and the support that they needed, and then find themselves oftentimes in trouble. The mayor references the percentage, the high percentage, almost 50 percent of the inmates at Rikers Island suffered from some form of dyslexia or otherwise, a reading disability that went undiagnosed, unsupported.

And we got to change that and we will and are. That's the reason why we chose to come here today because we are launching a new dyslexia initiative here that will start out as a program and eventually become a school. We hope by next year that it will be a school. Only reason it didn't open as a school this year is because the state was not ready just yet. So we are out in front of the state in terms of getting credentialed for a program like this, but we certainly will be working with the state so that it will become a fully certified school by next year and it can't come soon enough. This place will serve as a beacon and a blueprint if you will, for students who are suffering from print based disabilities and other challenges with a specific focus on dyslexia in this particular site. So one of the parents who was here, Lastassia Hargrove, I'd like for you to just come and talk to us a little bit about your experience and what you are thinking about as we kick off this school year. Thank you.

**Lastassia Hargrove:** Good morning.

**Chancellor Banks:** Good morning.

**Hargrove:** I'm very proud that they have this program in the school here because I've noticed with my son, from when he was small, that there was an issue. I started at three-years-old

sending him to get evaluated, but they told me, first, he was too young. When he started at 3-K they said, "Wait till he goes into the public school system so he can get Oasis number." And then once he got to 161, they started doing a regular evaluation. Now that he's going into the third grade, we have a new program that they're going to be implementing, which I think it will be great for my son. And I was just trying to be his advocate and speaking to his teachers, his counselors, the social workers, and letting them know that I think it is a problem with my son. That's one thing I never denied that there was something going on and I let parents know, don't be scared, speak for your child. Your child can't speak for themselves until they hear your voice.

They're going to be the ones to let you know, once you tell and speak for them, they're going to let you know, "Mom, I think it's something wrong." So that's the first thing I noticed. I became his advocate and I started talking for him. I let the schools know that I think it's something going on with my son. And now that they have this program, they found it fit for him. And I'm so proud that they're going to have it here at the school right here, that we are here in at 161. I just thank everybody. And we are going to see how this program works. And I know it's going to be great and happy school year. (Applause.)

**Chancellor Banks:** Yes. Thank you. Wonderful and amazing. You proud of your mom? And this is Carter, everybody. Let's look at this handsome, brilliant young man. I saw him as he came in this morning and there are so many Carters across the system who are absolutely brilliant.

**Audience member:** That's right.

**Chancellor Banks:** They're filled with promise and potential, but sometimes they need a little extra help. And when they don't get that little bit of extra help, they can very easily get off track.

**Mayor Eric Adams:** That's right.

**Chancellor Banks:** And that has happened to millions of New Yorkers who have gone through our public school system. I'm so appreciative of the mayor for making this initiative a primary focus as we were coming into education. This is something that people have mentioned, but it's not anything that we've ever leaned into as a public school system. And it was this mayor who would not let it go, he continues to push. And the dyslexia is a component of a larger challenge that we are leaning head on into. And that is just the fundamental way in which we teach our kids how to read.

Over the last 20 to 25 years, New York City school system took on — and school systems really across the nation — something that's referred to as balanced literacy. It's a very different approach to the teaching of reading. And the results are really in now across the nation, it has not rendered the results that are needed. Many of us grew up and came up in a system where we learned through a phonetic approach to the teaching of reading. And we got away from that. Well, we are here to say that we are returning to that approach because if we cannot ensure that every child can read by the third grade, we will spend millions more of resources, just trying to catch up.

It's what the mayor talks about all the time, upstream and downstream. If you get it right at the beginning, you don't have to spend all of those resources downstream. And so that's what we are committed to. And we're very focused I think because this mayor has led this effort. This has

been a personal focus of his, and he has made sure that everyone at New York City public schools offices are completely focused on this. You are going to see a dramatic change over the next several years in reading scores and our approach to the teaching of reading. And we're really thrilled to be here today. And this time wanted to introduce our mayor, Mayor Eric Adams.

**Mayor Adams:** So significant today when you see the first day of school and look who I am here with. I am here with my commissioner of Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. I'm here with my police commissioner. Here with my chancellor. I'm here with just my team, because as Borough President Gibson has acknowledged so many times — and I agree that it's a team effort. That is going to be the hallmark of my administration. We're going to desilo government and realize that the problem of one agency is not isolated to the agency, it is part of the team approach. Commissioner Sue and Chancellor Banks, they understand that safety for children is not only what happens within the sterilized environment of the classroom, but is while they are on their journey home and what happens in their home place. And how do we utilize all of our tools and resources to make sure our children are receiving the quality that they deserve.

This is such a significant moment for us. So often we go through the traditional phase of opening the school year, and we believe that is another moment of having children come to school, ignoring the fact that 65 percent of Black and brown children leave that school year not reaching proficiency and we have normalized that. We have normalized and believed the fact that we have betrayed children. We have betrayed children. But in the process of the betrayal of children, we betrayed teachers. We betrayed principals. We betrayed everyone that's part of the school system because they have been asking for someone just to hear them, respect them, and give them the support that they deserve. And that is what we are going to do in this administration. And that is my commitment. Started off as borough president putting over \$140 million in our school system. I knew that if we didn't get it right in education, we won't get it right in our city. And so today starts the journey. 180 days.

**Audience member:** That's right.

**Mayor Adams:** 180 days of shaping the minds of not the future leaders, but the leaders of today.

**Audience member:** Yes.

**Mayor Adams:** We just have to get out of their way and allow them to lead. This is where students gather, learn, meet new friends, eat, exercise, explore, and expand their minds in a real way. 180 days. 180 days of moving through these hallways, listening to the joyous voices that they produce to allow us to know what is our true north star, as the chancellor would say. We want every child to have a chance to be able to thrive and grow and prosper no matter their zip code, no matter their ethnicity, no matter how they got here. It doesn't mean that they arrived here through the nefarious actions of a despicable governor that treated them in a brutal way. Those 1,400 students would be treated with the same love and nurturing of those students who grew up in this educational system. The school year in New York City — first openly dyslexia mayor this is full circle from me for me. Come here, brother. (Applause.)

I saw you and I decided to get an earring also. This is Eric, y'all.

**Chancellor Banks:** That's right. Come on.

**Mayor Adams:** This Eric. This is Eric. This is Eric Adams. This powerful mom, come here, mommy. Reminds me of my mother. She had six children, loved them all, but she adored me. And to find this mother — if we don't take any other soundbite we should take your soundbite.

**Chancellor Banks:** Yes.

**Mayor Adams:** Mothers and children have been embarrassed to say, "I need help." We placed them and we stigmatized them. We gave them these titles and we made them believe that because they were bold enough to say, "I need help." I was afraid and ashamed to say, "I'm not learning." It hurt when I walked in that classroom and saw "dummy" on the back of the chair and being bullied as a child. It hurt. And mom tried so hard, and hearing this mother say that, "My son needs help." We just learn differently.

That's all. We learn differently. And because of that different skill, you grow up from being dyslexic to leading. You grow up to be mayors, man. (Applause.) You know that? You grow up to be mayors. You know that? Let me give you my number, and you and I are going to rock throughout the year. And you going to come to City Hall, you going to hang out with me.

**Hargrove:** Oh wow.

**Mayor Adams:** You are going to be the symbol of this program. This young, bright man, this young scholar. And there's so many like him that have been left behind, left behind. This is such a significant and powerful moment for us. That this young man is going to have an opportunity that historically has been denied. And mommy, I am just so proud of you.

**Chancellor Banks:** Yes.

**Hargrove:** Thank you.

**Mayor Adams:** So proud of you.

**Chancellor Banks:** Bless you.

**Hargrove:** Thank you.

**Mayor Adams:** To identify and say, "Listen, I'm going to get the best for my son." That is just a powerful moment. And this is what the chancellor and I stand for. Two public school children — now, I'm running the school system and running the city. That's this moment — that some people would miss it, it would go over their heads. These ordinary kids growing up to be extraordinary people and making an extraordinary impact.

And Mark, as you and the leaders of this system, I want to thank you and all the principals that get up every day early, take money out of their pockets for these scholars and these babies. And all the teachers that come in everyday. Teaching is a calling. You don't do this because you are trying to become a billionaire. You do it because you believe in these scholars and we have demonized a noble profession. Not in this administration. (Cheers.) And we are going to do several other big ticket items here. We're going to continue as the Chancellor stated, to lean into

reading, give these children opportunity, develop the entire child — healthy food, learning how to deal with some of the trauma that they experience, teaching mindfulness, our CTE programs, teaching how to cross pollinate with the different environments. The classroom experience is not only what happens in this building, it's what happens out there. Our children need to learn about the different cultures. Then be healthy. That's why Dr. Vasan is here from the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. This is a team effort that we are moving forward to accomplish.

For the first time, we have added more than a thousand new Gifted and Talented Programs. Every district. Every district. It was unbelievable we had some districts that did not have Gifted and Talented Programs. We have normalized the fact that some children were better than other children in this city. This is just what's unacceptable what we have witnessed throughout these years. There will now be a Gifted and Talented Program in every school district in every borough. We are providing two points of entry, kindergarten and third grade. Imagine you take the test or you do something in kindergarten and that's the rest of your life. No, we have to continue to monitor for those accelerated learners. We are bringing equity to a process that Black and brown students have often been ignored. We have to acknowledge that and stop trying to deny it. So that all accelerated learners will have the opportunities that they deserve.

Our city is also built by many different communities and that's why [Commissioner] Castro is here. They're from all over the world. Yet, too often their experiences are not represented in our classroom, so we are piloting a project called Hidden Voices. This is leaning into education around our AAPI community. I'm so proud that we were able to partner with our state lawmakers, Senator John Liu in particular, to move this forward with Congresswoman Grace Meng. But we are invested in the future. The data is clear: invest in college early, you're more likely to go to college in the future. We have put \$100 into scholarship accounts for every New York City kindergartener so that their family can start thinking about and saving for college early. Unbelievable opportunity. That's a total of \$6.5 million for over 65,000 scholarship accounts for the past year. We've baseline this — this will be done every year as new kindergarteners enter our system. We're really proud of this.

Meatless Mondays. We are expanding on that to plant-based Fridays. It baffles me that we know that school food is harming our children and every time I take a hot dog off the plate of someone, I lose a vote. I know this is an emotional issue, but the data is clear. The data is clear that what we are feeding our babies is unhealthy. It feeds childhood obesity. It feeds — childhood diabetes. It is feeding the crises. And so this is a bold step to say, we're going to examine the food that we are feeding our children. Show them healthy eating. I believe I heard the principal talk about a garden. We want gardens in our schools. We want our children to grow those vegetables, serve them in their classroom, to learn about the nutritional values. And this is a bold step and it's a holistic step. That's why we have our commission of Department of Health and Mental Hygiene partnering with Health and Hospital, partnering with school foods. We want to develop the whole child, not just part of the child and give them healthy habits for the future. That's what we want to accomplish here.

Moving forward, we're going to reimagine school culture and school safety. You're so right, commissioner. I'm not part of that chorus that states we don't need school safety offices in our school. We do. And this administration is going to make sure they're there. And those school safety officers, overwhelmingly women and women of color, they're more than providing safety. They talk to the children, they nurture them, they identify problems. They are the aunties and the

mothers of these children and they love these children. Whoever believed that having the presence of a school safety officer in the school means that you are criminalizing a school, they are just wrong. They are just wrong. School safety officers are part of the school community, and we are going to encourage them to continue to expand and find pathways for them to have an expanded career in the process.

So our Chancellor Banks announced yesterday hiring more than 200 school safety agents to keep our children safe, put his systems in place so schools can communicate with families immediately in times of crises. Nothing is worse than a crisis happening in your school and you don't know if your child is safe or not. We want to be able to communicate with parents right away. And training our staff to respond to threats. Threats in schools are real. They're real. And we need to be serious about protecting them and the chancellor has made that clear and I fully supported.

We'll be adding 110 social workers to work with superintendent teams to provide that counseling and need. The increase in mental health concerns in our city and our country is a real concern that we want to be there to give the support that's needed. Then we want to lean into social emotional learning. So important to do so in our elementary schools, to develop the foundation for our children, not only to be academically smart but emotionally intelligent as they communicate with people every day.

Must have excellent public schools, folks, if we are to survive as a free people in a free society. So I'm happy to be here — the first day of school, a school that's going to be focusing on dyslexia. Life is about turning pain into purpose and finding your mission and your purpose. Every day on that campaign trail I thought about this day. Thought about the day of going back into a school building and finding that Eric Adams, and he could rip off the back of his chair both physically and emotionally that sign of being called "dummy" and know that just as the mayor overcame those hurdles. I too can overcome my hurdles if I just had the help. Today we are giving them that help. And this is a great moment for our school system, but most importantly this is a great moment for our city. Thank you very much. Thank you. (Applause.)

**Chancellor Banks:** Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. I just continue to be inspired by the mayor, I really do. The only reason I took this position of becoming chancellor of the New York City school system is because it was this mayor who asked me to do it. And I believe in him, I believe in his vision and the entire New York City public school system is fully focused on achieving that mission and that vision. But we can't do it alone. We do this together with community and it is really important. I want everyone to understand that this administration is very focused on how we engage the broader community. The reason that we have lost so many parents over these last several years is we've not fully engaged our parents and our families and our community, and so we are going to stay very connected to the community.

I want to acknowledge CEC7 President Danielle Vera, if you would just acknowledge... I want to thank you for your leadership and we're going to stay very closely connected in this work. I want to acknowledge again, and the mayor pointed out Mark Cannizzaro, who is the president of the principals' union. Thank you so much, Mark. He's not just here today, but since I've become chancellor, we have worked regularly and we've worked very intensely throughout the summer to prepare for a very successful opening and a successful school year. So, he's one of my closest partners. Those are the sounds of the opening of school everyone. I also want to acknowledge

someone who's a parent advocate. She's known by everybody all across the Bronx, but she is the embodiment of what it means to be a community leader who's engaged and believes deeply in our children, Ms. Pat Williams. Pat, I just want to thank you for being here as well.

Finally, there will be, as the mayor pointed out, a re-imagined school experience. We're going to do school differently. The teaching of reading is just but one. Civic engagement, you're going to see a student government in every school in New York City. And not just student government, but we want students studying the issues of the day so that they understand the issues that are really relevant to their lives. There's a reason why so many Americans don't vote. We graduate them from high school and they're totally disconnected because we've never developed in the K-12 space the deep connection to what this democracy is all about. Our democracy is under assault right now. So the only way we're going to fortify it is we make sure that our young people are fortified in understanding how it works and how it actually impacts their lives.

It's not enough to tell young people you need to vote, you have to help them understand why. How does it connect to their lives? And those are the kinds of things that you're going to see that are going to be different. We're going to still have a very serious focus on the arts. We get asked questions a lot around learning loss and coming off of COVID. One of the best things that you can do is to continue to be very focused on the arts. Art, music, dance, spoken word, all those things make a huge difference. It's not just by what we are doing in our schools, it's engaging the community. We have community based organizations which do so much of this work. And people bring up all the time and say what about the budget cuts? We have people from our community who are seeking to get in the game. They have all kinds of resources and supports. We're opening the doors to them to partner with us to bring their best talent and their resources to us as well. We cannot do this alone.

Lastly, I just want to acknowledge the women who have led this Literacy Academy Collective. Please, if you would just stand and be recognized. This work of dyslexia in this school is being driven by the women here who have led this from the very beginning. I want to personally salute you and to thank you. We wouldn't be here today without you. Thank you so very, very much. Appreciate you. So with that, who's handling the press for us? Yes sir.

**Question:** (Inaudible) parents will be worried about is there an emergency situation. Can you break down what you guys would do in an emergency situation, just to help ease some parents' fears as they return to school?

**Commissioner Sewell:** So for us, it comes down to communication and being able to get the information out as quickly as possible to keep the school safe. To lock it down or lock it in case there is an emergency. We actually put our School Safety Division on a channel that has direct communication with the Police Department. There are a number of schools that have panic alarms in the principal's office to be able to get direct contact. But being able to have the presence of the school safety agents in the schools across this city is paramount, to have that connection. They are part of the Police Department. To be able to communicate the danger, to have the NYPD officers respond when necessary. And we plan to increase that communication and the technology to be able to make those notifications.

(Inaudible.)

**Chancellor Banks:** Yeah, I can respond to that part as well. Yeah. One of the things we announced yesterday was the development of a new app. Essentially, it's a push notification system. Every parent will be able to sign up for this, and they will be able to get real time responses on what's happening in the schools.

So as an example, one of the things we pointed out was when you saw what happened in Sunset Park, right outside of that subway, there were about three or four schools within just a couple of blocks. The parents, particularly of the students who go to those schools, were frantic. And many of them had to wait and watch and see what was happening on TV to find out what was really going on. That has now changed. They will have direct communication. They will get real time responses from the leadership at the Department of Education, from their school principals. They will have that kind of real access. So to the commissioner's point, we are enhancing the level of communication with our parents. That reduces anxiety, lets them know that their child is safe, and how they need to be deployed, whether or not they need to show up, or when they should show up and where they should show up. So we're very excited about this new technology that's been developed.

**Question:** Can you just speak about this budget battle, the redo? Are you going to add that money back in? The City Council wants you to. What's going on with that?

**Mayor Adams:** It's not a budget battle. The way the system of government operates is that the mayor presents our budget. The Council use all of their staff to review the budget, and then they vote on the budget. This is a historical moment that the Council is fighting against a budget that they approved. We are going to make sure that every child and every school receives the resources that they need. We have completely conformed and handled the Fair Student Funding, 100 percent. And we've gone beyond that.

Here's what the City Council is stating, in essence. That there's a lot of stimulus money out there. Let's just spend this stimulus money like it's here forever. It is not. The money is running out, and every dollar that we have is accounted for already.

I think the Daily News front page said it all. We're facing a potential \$10 billion deficit in the out-years. We must be fiscally smart. We must make sure we have the equity that we need for our children. And if anyone believes it's just about spending money, then tell me. With all the money we spent in the past, why are 65 percent of Black and brown children unable to reach proficiency? It's not about just spending money. It's about spending money to get the result that taxpayers deserve. And we are confident that we are going to make the right investments in our schools. We have enough resources that if the number of students increase in certain schools, the chancellor's going to make sure they get the resources there. So we know we are doing the right thing and time is going to show how focused we are about spending taxpayers' money the appropriate way.

**Question:** This question is for Commissioner Sewell. We saw someone ask this last year, why are we still (inaudible) school police, specifically very close to campus. Yesterday we had a tragedy in Downtown Brooklyn. What kinds of things can you use for special security outside?

**Commissioner Sewell:** So first, our hearts go out to the family of that young man yesterday. Since the beginning of the year, the mayor and I have had to stand at too many podiums on too

many streets to address the violence committed against our children. And sadly, some of this violence is committed by children. So we can talk about what we do in these walls as school safety agents, but it does extend beyond these buildings. And I can put youth coordination officers in parks. I can put police officers on streets, which I will do, and I am committed to making sure our children come to and go home safely. But as the mayor has said, and as we all see as a recurring theme, that it takes more than just the Police Department. It takes the community. It takes all of us working together to make our children safe. So while we are committed to doing that and we will do that, we need teachers, students who see problems with their fellow students. We need classes in conflict resolution to be able to see there was something else beyond going toward violence.

Make no mistake about it. The NYPD is committed to the safety of all the students and teachers and the areas surrounding our schools. But the future of public safety in this city is starting school today, walking these halls. We have to show them a better way, and that is what this administration is committed to doing, and the mayor has made that possible.

**Commissioner Banks:** Let me just also, to add to that point as well. Again, the NYPD alone cannot be responsible for the safety of all of our children. It is a community collective that has to take place. In the next few days, you'll be hearing from the mayor and police commissioner, something we call Project Pivot. And I'm very excited about that. Essentially what it is is we've gotten community-based organizations from all across the city as credible messengers, mentors, folks from the community who are going to be able to lean in and help to support those young people.

Every school — I can take you to any school in New York City — every school has a handful of students that keep the teachers up all night. They can tell you the names of the kids right off the top of their heads. That's just real talk. Those students are just crying out. The students that you see who are out here running around and committing acts of violence, they hurt themselves, they hurt others, they're crying out for support, for help. Many of them are damaged in so many ways from different things that have happened to them, and we can't just expect that the NYPD can solve that. The community has to solve that. That's why this administration is so focused back on engaging the community at large. And you'll be hearing more about that in the coming days.

**Question:** You mentioned (inaudible) earlier. And one of the huge challenges here is that there are quite a number of students in small schools. So one in five elementary schools last year had 200 to 300 kids. So I'm curious if you're planning to consider a merger or propose a merger, or are you just going to keep lots of really small schools open? Which is obviously a really expensive thing to do.

**Chancellor Banks:** The research is in on small schools. Small schools really work. I was a principal for many years of a small school. Any time children have an opportunity to go to a school where they're known by adults in the building and nobody slips through the cracks, that's always a really, really good thing. If a school is just so small that it just doesn't make sense for the school to operate, we're certainly going to be looking at all those things. But I don't look at that as an issue as it relates to overarching enrollment.

When it comes to enrollment, our focus is on how do we get more kids to come back to school? And I think those are the things that the mayor was just talking about. Programs like this, how

we're changing reading, gifted and talented programs, our investments in career pathways. Which again, more work that you're going to be hearing about in the coming days, as well. There's going to be a number of really exciting announcements about the new, innovative approaches that we are taking to this body of work.

One of the things we've heard oftentimes was we have shortages for teachers and struggles and bilingual teachers. We are now in partnership with something else that we will be announcing soon enough. We've been talking to representatives from the Dominican Republic. We have a group of Dominican educators who came to us to say, "Let's get teachers from the Dominican Republic who would come here. They can be bilingual teachers." So we just had 25 teachers who just got here. We're trying to finish up the paperwork to get them fully certified, but there are many more who are potentially coming. It's just another level of innovation to do something out of the box and do it differently. The work that's happening here that you all are getting ready to launch with the dyslexia program is another example of the things that will attract parents to come back into the system. That's what we're focused on. We can't continue to do things the same way that we were doing them. We have to be much more innovative.

**Question:** Dyslexia programs. I know there's two of them. And how many students are in the one here? I assume they're just elementary school age? (Inaudible.) Can you talk about that?

**Chancellor Banks:** Yeah. They're elementary age students to start, but these are programs that we're actually going to grow. We also have this dyslexia work that we're doing at about 160 more schools as pilot projects for us as well. But all teachers across the system are going to be trained in dyslexia. We're doing the screenings in these 160 schools, but everybody's going to begin to get the professional development and what to look for as relates to dyslexia. This is just our base year for this work. We're going to expand on this by next year and the years after, but we got to make sure that it's done just the right way, that we've got the right materials. And that's why the work that's going on in this school is going to serve really as a laboratory, in many ways, to teach the rest of the school system about what we need to do.

**Question:** How many students are in the pilot program?

**Chancellor Banks:** There are about 30, 32 in this school, and approximately the same in the other school as well.

**Question:** Thank you.

(Crosstalk.)

**Question:** Good morning, Mayor Adams.

**Mayor Adams:** How are you?

**Question:** I'm great, thanks.

**Mayor Adams:** Good.

**Question:** First day of school. I wanted to get some clarity on what's been going on with the (inaudible) Houses. I saw (inaudible) the city (inaudible). Can you explain what's going on? In particular, what kind of NYCHA to test the water at these houses. What is the update now and when will the water be safe for people there, including the students to actually drink it?

**Mayor Adams:** Last week, as you know, last Monday, there was a lab that gave results that there were traces of arsenic in the water. City Hall was notified on Friday, and we immediately kicked into gear to make sure that we can give NYCHA residents water to — for drinking water. We had a series of tests that took place over a hundred since then, and each one came back with untraceable amounts of arsenic. The lab that tested last week on Monday just notified us yesterday that they found a trace of legion, was it legionnaire?

**Commissioner Ashwin Vasan, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Legionella.

**Mayor Adams:** Legionella in the water. We questioned that because that was the same lab that gave us the questionable results before. But out of an overabundance of caution, we continue to give water. We're going to do the test to make sure before we tell residents to drink water again that comes from their tap. We want to be 100 percent sure. But we also want to be 100 percent transparent. As soon as that lab notified us that they saw those traces, we immediately notified the public. So when we are 100 percent comfortable that the water should be consumed by drinking, we will make that notification when we finish all the tests. And we're not going to be expeditious, we're going to be thorough and make sure we do it right. And as we get information, my team has been told and directed by me, we're going to immediately let it be known. That is why we did this yesterday. (Audience shouting.) Whoa, whoa. Hold on. Hold on. Y'all know we don't rock like that. This is one at a time. You know all of that. This is the school, students don't yell out. Okay, go ahead.

**Question:** My first part of the question was what prompted the initial test in the first place? That hasn't even been answered. Was there any concern? Are these routine tests at all? NYCHA developments go through (inaudible). What prompted the first round of tests and (inaudible)?

**Mayor Adams:** I think it was a combination. There are routine tests because Riis Houses — they have two water towers that handle the high-rises, not the low-rises. And there are routine tests there. But at the same time there were complaints of cloudy water. So, I think it was a combination that prompted the original test. NYCHA would give you the exact reason for the original test, but I do know they do periodic testing of the water towers and also they were concerned about cloudy water.

**Question:** Okay, so now I want to talk about COVID because we have a new updated booster. I wanted to know if there are any plans for the city to put it into very public circulation (inaudible) an updated booster.

**Mayor Adams:** Okay. Yes, I will. The attractive model looking gentleman to my left is my doctor, Dr. Vasan, and he'll answer the other part. (Laughter.)

**Commissioner Vasan:** Yes. We're excited about the bivalent booster. Because we're using the original formulation, one of the critiques over time is that people who are fully vaccinated have gotten infected. If this bivalent booster is widely adopted, we also expect transmission to be

suppressed as well, in addition to continued protection against severe illness and death. So, we're recommending everyone who's 12 and older, who's more than two months after their last dose, whether that's a primary series or a booster to come out, call your doctor, go to [vaccinefinder.nyc.gov](http://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov) and get your booster now. We're particularly focused on people who are at higher risk.

People who are over 65, people who are unvaccinated or under vaccinated, and people who live with chronic comorbidities like diabetes, obesity, chronic lung disease, cancer, and immunosuppression. So, we will be releasing and announcing plans in order to introduce the vaccine into circulation. I will say clearly that we have seen a pullback of congressional emergency funds, so don't expect to see an emergency response with popup tents and mass vaccination sites. We are leaning on our healthcare system. We are leaning on primary care providers, we are leaning on our hospital systems, and chain pharmacies as well. CVS, Walgreens, and the like to really get this vaccination out there. I'm very much looking forward to giving the mayor his vaccine soon.

**Question:** Are the vaccines actually in the city now, or do they exist?

**Commissioner Vasan:** Yes. Providers have already started ordering. The CDC just issued its clinical guidance earlier this week, which is the trigger that allows people to start making appointments and start administering the vaccine. So it's in the city now and we'll start to see that slowly roll out.

**Question:** Just to follow up on the (inaudible) water. There's still no explanation from the cloudy water that prompted the test to begin with, and — that's my understanding, just to be clear. Also, is this something that water filters might be able to help with? Maybe Dr. Vasan can weigh in with the trace of arsenic and the bacteria. Obviously we're talking about low-income public housing residents with water filters become very expensive. But could that be a solution if they could get access to free or reduced cost water filters?

**Mayor Adams:** Doctor, she was asking about the... What the filters out.

**Commissioner Vasan:** Well, I cannot speak to the treatment of the water. Our role in this, and my role as a scientist, as a doctor, has been to provide guidance to our building owners, in this case. We do that for building owners across the city. We provide that technical guidance, and that's what we're doing to our partners at NYCHA now. Let me just start by saying I understand completely the anxiety of families, of parents, of residents when they hear results like this. So, part of our job is to, as the mayor said, be extraordinarily thorough. To be clear, but also to really take the time to ensure that this water is safe. And as soon as we're comfortable with the results that we've received, we'll be making those announcements about when that water is safe to drink with and to cook with. I'm proud of the mayor and the team for bringing together an emergency response to get drinkable, potable water to people as soon as we understood the results.

**Question:** Mayor, this is back on-topic for schools. You spoke in the past about exploring new security technology for public schools similar to U.S. airports. Is there any update on that?

**Mayor Adams:** Yeah, again, the goal is to make sure the products we purchase can produce the results we're looking for. We're testing these products. Our goal was to find a system where

children would not have to go through the intrusiveness of walking through a metal detector. There are more friendlier and less intrusive models out there, and we have been thoroughly testing them. But they have to be 100 percent thorough in being able to identify handguns and dangerous weapons. We've narrowed it down to two products, but we're going to continue to make sure we're going to get the product that we want and the results that we want.

**Question:** Mayor, you mentioned that Legionella was found in the water at the Riis Houses. Are you going to elaborate on that?

**Commissioner Vasan:** We were notified — that is, NYCHA and then later the Department of Health — were notified yesterday about a positive sample for... that tested positive for Legionella. The bacteria that causes Legionnaires disease in the drinkable water, in the potable water. That is not how Legionella spreads, by ingestion of potable water. It is through aerosolized water, usually in cooling systems, ventilation systems, HVAC systems. So, this is a different water source. And as the mayor said, there are some questions about the sample itself which I know that NYCHA and others are looking into. But what we can say and what triggers the Department of Health to do investigations is concern of reported cases of Legionnaires' disease. That's what triggers investigations. So, the presence of a bacterial sample doesn't trigger clinical investigations. I also know that our partners at NYCHA have taken steps since the initial reports of cloudy water to do sanitation and cleaning of the system. We've also flushed the system in that time as well. So...

**Question:** So I have one more question about COVID, specifically people who are zero to four of getting the vaccine. It looks like that the last time I checked, it was around 6 percent. What's the accurate number, in terms of how many children in that age group have not gotten the vaccine. Is there anything the city wants to do in order to spread awareness about this, or trying to get better (inaudible)?

**Commissioner Vasan:** Yeah, we're seeing this trend all across the country. Vax uptake for the six month to five-year-old vaccine, which was launched in June, has been low. That's a combination of factors, right? Number one, we're at a different point in the COVID epidemic, COVID pandemic than we've ever been in terms of transmission. But also the dissociation of transmission and severe illness and death. What does that mean? In some, that means that people's risk assessment is different. Their personal risk assessment, community risk assessment is different and we're wrestling with those issues as an administration right now. How do we assess risk? How do we communicate risk? And how do we design policy around that risk? So, that's a trend. There's also been an incredible amount of anti-science, anti-vax movement around these vaccines. In particular the under-five vaccines that we are combating against. We continue to do that around all of our Covid vaccines.

**Commissioner Vasan:** We face this sort of misinformation campaigns and disinformation campaigns. But in particular, the under-five vaccine has faced this particularly. So, we are re-upping our messaging around back to school, back to daycare immunizations, routine immunizations. You'll be seeing that roll out in the coming days. We are doing a lot of engagement with pediatricians and parents throughout the five boroughs. And in particular, as you imagine, school physicals and daycare physicals are underway and still ongoing. So we are encouraging pediatricians to incorporate conversations around the vaccine into those visits. So

those are the steps we're taking to try to move that number up. But we're definitely facing an uphill challenge.

**Question:** Any incentives, like \$100 gift cards that they were doing last administration?

**Commissioner Vasan:** We've certainly found that incentives had had limited but effective success in certain environments, particularly when there was a higher risk level and a higher sense of emergency around COVID. At this time, we're not considering that, but all options are on the table for the future.

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